The Comanches

755 wrapped with sinew and softened in water was pushed down the throat to clear it.[10]

752 Although buffalo medicine was worked to cure bloody wounds, especially gunshot wounds, mechanical tourniquets were used when necessary. Surgery was also relied upon. Slope tells of a battle casualty whose intestines protruded from a belly wound. A medicine man stopped the bleeding by putting his buffalo tail in his mouth and blowing on the wound. He then pressed the intestines back into place, and after burning the spines off a prickly pear cactus, split it. The open surfaces of the cactus were pressed against the flesh on both sides of the wound to compress it. It was then bound up and left to heal.

757 For patients with rheumatism or headaches some doctors dug a trench and heated it with a fire until the ground cracked. Raking out the fire, they laid a bed of sage, poured cold water on to steam it, and felt to see that it was not too hot. The patient lay down in the trench and was covered by a buffalo robe or blanket for a good baking.

For toothache they heated tree fungus and held it to the aching jaw. Cavities were treated by stuffing a dried mushroom of a certain variety in the hole. A laxative was made by boiling the cambium layer of the willow tree. Healing by means of herbs was practiced by men and women alike, whether professional doctors or not, just as was the case with whites in pioneer America. Almost every man and old woman had a bundle of medicines peculiarly his own, the secrets of which were known only to the owner. One such remedy used by a doctor was about as follows. With the liquid obtained from boiling certain herbs, he bathed the patient. With a paste derived from the liquid he also painted dog tracks on the patient and on a large dog.[11]

Some of the owners of medicines were supposed to have learned of the various medicinal plants by means of dreams or through some mythical hero who went out on the prairie with the individual and pointed out various plants for use in treating diseases. Fasting was a 752 common treatment for most ailments. The Comanches are credited with "being expert in curing gun-shot wounds, and in the treatment

[10] Informant: She Invites Her Relatives.
[11] Informant: Medicine Woman.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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of fractured limbs, which they bandage with neatness and good effect," but they did not attempt amputation. If blood flowed too freely, it was checked by packing the wound with grass. Likewise, it is claimed that they had one or more good remedies for rattlesnake bites. Several formulae were concocted from roots and herbs, but possibly the most effective treatment was to cut out the injured part and then suck the wound to draw out the poison. A poultice made of prickly pear leaves was applied to check inflammation and was a common remedy applied to wounds, as in the abdomen case just cited.[12] The prickly pear poultice is still a home remedy in our own society.

Petroleum was also considered to be an excellent healing salve. A Comanche chief once took Thomas C. Battey to a place on Medicine Creek, Oklahoma, where there was a "heap of medicine—good, black medicine." It was oil on top of water.[13] Near by, on top of Adams Hill, they found a heavy exudation of petroleum which they used as a salve on the sore backs of their horses.[14]

The "madstone" or medicine bone was used for wounds, infections, boils, and pains. It was a small piece of the leg bone of the giant prehistoric mammoth, believed by the Comanches to be bones of *piamɜmpits*—the cannibal owl. Placed over the affected spot, it was supposed to draw out the poison.[15] In case of internal pain, some doctors treated by cutting the patient where the pain seemed to be and then attempting to suck out the pain or evil spirit. The sucking was done through a small horn prepared for the purpose, which was placed over the incision. The doctor would spit out whatever he sucked from the wound. The clever medicine man might show the patient some small stones, which he had placed in his mouth, and pretend that he had sucked them from the wound with the aid of his spiritual power, claiming that the stones had been the cause of the pain.

[12] Burnet, "The Comanches and Other Tribes of Texas and the Policy to Be Pursued Respecting Them," *loc. cit.*, 233; Neighbors, "The Naüni or Comanches of Texas," *loc. cit.*, 129; C. and J. D. Smith, *op. cit.*, 56; J. Lee Humfreville, *Twenty Years among Our Savage Indians*, 242.

[13] Battey, *op. cit.*, 189.

[14] Nye, *Carbine and Lance*, 99.

[15] Informants: Medicine Woman; Yellowfish. Medicine stones are still in use among the Comanches.

5: Carlson & Jones E, N-4, 5 (1933)1939
NO6 Comanche NO6

824 278 757 to the informant) and boiled, the brew being used both externally and internally. The stems of a sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*) were soaked in water, and the body was bathed with this liquid. As a cure for colds the bark of the sumac (*Rhus trilobata*) was chewed and the juice swallowed.

A few miscellaneous remedies remain to be described.[4] The leaves of snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*) were mixed with some other substance (unknown to the informant) as a remedy for whooping cough, and the roots of the nightshade (*Solanum sp.*) were boiled and the decoction prescribed as a general tonic, particularly in cases of tuberculosis. An infusion for reducing swellings was made from the red false mallow (*Malvastrum coccineum*) steeped in water. The tribes of the Missouri River region employed this plant in a similar manner (7, p. 103). Their practice was to chew the roots and apply [752] them to inflamed sores and wounds as a cooling and healing salve. The mucilaginous properties of the plant probably account for its use in this way. The roots of the dotted button snakeroot (*Liatris punctata*) were chewed and the juice swallowed as a cure for swollen testes. The leaves of the pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) or of the walnut (*Juglans nigra*), ground and rubbed on the affected part, were thought efficacious for ringworm.

824 411 434 The Comanche used the branches of the Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*) in the manufacture of bows. This was the preferred wood for the making of bows throughout most of the Plains region. Since the Osage orange occurs in only a limited area, from southern Missouri to northern Texas, its wood became a valuable trade article. There are accounts telling of the great demand for it among tribes as far north as the Arikara and the Blackfoot and as far west as the Pueblos. John D. Hunter, who spent many years as a captive among the Indians of the Arkansas and Missouri country, says of the Osage orange (11, p. 173):

[825 752] [4] Two nonvegetal Comanche medicines were also collected. Although these are not pertinent to a discussion of plant uses, they may be recorded briefly. One is the nest of some nondomestic bee (Comanche: *tipinatsu*), composed of a gummy substance which gives off a pungent odor when heated. The nest was placed on the fire; its fumes, inhaled by one who was unconscious, were said to revive the person quickly. The other medicine is a white chalky mineral, apparently fossil bones (Comanche: *tsɔβit'sitsuni*), which was obtained from deposits and used in treating sprains and fractures. The Comanche considered [776] this mineral to be the bones of Piamupits, a supernatural being.

31: Jones E-5 (1967-1970) 1972 NO6 Comanche NO6
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278 824 heart. Her idea of the location of the sinus cavities is essentially correct, though she does not understand their function.
755
757
[77]
[137]

ekɔpa

"red bean" *Sophora secundiflora* (mescal bean)

Sanapia grinds the mescal bean to the consistency of granulated sugar and then boils this coarse powder, which she first wraps in a makeshift cloth bag. When the decoction has reached the desired brownish coloration, it is strained through another piece of cloth, and the liquid is used as eardrops in the doctoring [84] of earaches and sores deep in the ear. Sanapia reports that her maternal uncle, a [783] *puhakut*, would sew mescal beans into the cuffs of his trousers as protection against possible contamination from menstrual blood.

puitsatene

[137] "eye scraper" *Elymus sp.* (rye grass)

Sanapia uses a single looped blade of this grass as a filelike tool in the removing of "cataracts" (trichoma). She describes this treatment as follows:

> You take that and double it up and turn the eye lid over and scrape it just as easy as you can. Then you just scrape it and scrape it until it bleeds . . . that thing on there bleeds. Well, you just keep on scraping until it finally comes off. Its the eye lid that causes cataracts because those things rub on the eye and make them sores. You got to scrape the eye. Put sugar water on it after you scrap it. It makes it feel better. Put sugar on after that thing stops bleeding.

kunɔnatsu

[137] "fire medicine" *Zanthoxylum americanum* (prickly ash)

An infusion is made from the root of this plant and used for the treatment [752] of fever. The powdered roor is also used in the treatment of toothache and burns. For toothaches, the powder is wrapped in a piece of cloth and this tiny bundle of medicine is placed next to the afflicted tooth. The medicine promotes a numbing in the mouth. In the treatment of burns, the powder is sprinkled dry on the burn. The term "fire medicine" stems from the burning sensation which this medicine causes when it contacts an open wound.

bakuma^{h}

[137] "in the water" *Iris sp.* (iris)

This plant is an unidentified variety of *Iris* which is not native to Sanapia's home area of Comanche County, Oklahoma. Sanapia utilizes a decoction of the root in the treatment of colds, upset stomache, and sore throat.

bakuma^{h} is the only medicine plant whose locale of growth is to some extent controlled by Sanapia. Her mother transplanted a number of these plants

31: Jones E-5 (1967-1970) 1972 NO6 Comanche NO6
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to a spring near Sanapia's home, and Sanapia makes an effort in her collection of this plant to never totally deplete the planting made by her mother.

This *Iris* is very similar to a variety which is found in eastern Oklahoma, significantly in an area of high Creek Indian population density. The Comanches and the Creeks have had close ties since the late nineteenth century (Wallace and Hoebel 1952:304), and Sanapia remembers traveling with her mother to eastern Oklahoma to visit Creek acquaintances. It is possible that Sanapia's mother could have learned of the medicinal qualities of this plant from the Creeks and brought back a collection to her home in Comanche County. The peculiar characteristics of the variety of *Iris* which Sanapia uses as medicine could have resulted from natural modifications stimulated through time by this change in environment.

pɔbɔβi

"white sage" *Artemisia ludoviciana* (lobed cudweed; gray sage)

Sanapia employs the leaves of the gray sage in treatment of insect and spider bites. She chews the leaves and rubs the resulting moist pulp over the area of bites to relieve itching and swelling.

ɛsipɔbɔβi

"sweet smelling sage" *Poliomentha incana* (sweet sage)

This medicine plant comes from the area of the Mescalero Apache reservation in southeastern New Mexico. It is obtained for Sanapia by Fort Sill Apaches who have ties with the Mescalero.

In a doctoring situation when Sanapia must apply her mouth to the afflicted area of the patient's body in an attempt to suck the sickness from the patient, she chews a small piece of sweet sage and retains it in her mouth with the masticated medicine which is being specifically employed at the time. She states that the sweet sage acts to sweeten the usually bitter taste which results from this type of procedure. Sweet sage, in certain circumstances, is also added to *bekwinatsu* (to be discussed) to increase its potency. It is also added to various medicinal "teas" to make them more palatable to the patients.

During Comanche peyote meetings held on Sanapia's property, it was pointed out that the leafy cushion upon which the Chief Peyote rested was made of sweet sage. The sweet sage used in the peyote meeting is particularly valued by Sanapia as a medicine since it gains an added potency through its contact with the Chief Peyote.

bekwinatsu

"swelling medicine" *Matelea biflora* or *cynanchoides* (recumbent milkweed)

This is one of Sanapia's major medicines and one of the three plants which she attributes with some degree of intrinsic supernatural potential. The other two medicines so considered are peyote and cedar.

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278 824 755 757 You just give them a cup full of this, and another cup, and another, and another . . . they just be filled up with that medicine. Sit around for ten or fifteen minutes and that medicine just goes in their stomach and stirs up all that fluid, whatever it is. When you got asthma, you got all those bronmicha [sic] tubes filled with slobber. That medicine takes it out. It comes out by itself, you don't have to vomit or nothing . . . through the mouth . . . comes right out. Some of it comes through the nose too. It runs out fast and they get well. You don't have to treat them another day longer.

itse

[No translation] [No specimen]

This medicine comes from the Mescalero Apache region and is obtained from the same sources which supply Sanapia with *ba:tasas* and *esipɔbɔβi*. Dr. Harry W. Basehart of the University of New Mexico, who has done field research among the Mescalero, states the word *itse* is very similar to a Mescalero word which means "mystical influence." Mrs. Julia A. Jordon made a similar suggestion based [177] on her experience with the Kiowa-Apache of Oklahoma. There is a strong possibility, then, that this word has been borrowed from Apache into Comanche.

The part of the plant which is utilized as medicine seems to be from [752] Sanapia's description, a fruiting body. The plant is chiefly used as a remedy for [825] the bites of rattlesnakes and as a rattlesnake repellent. Sanapia describes how she uses it as a snake repellent for her son:

> When he goes to the field, like now, I have it boiled and I just rub it on his leg like that and then a cloth and pour it on and tie it around his boots . . . pour it all on there. Now if there's a rattlesnake running right there, he right up on him, but he won't jump him. He smells that and he just lay low. It'll kill that snake right now. I don't know how it does it. That medicine is really strong. A rattlesnake ain't going to smell it. They going to die if they smell it.

Sanapia recalls that she saw old people among the Comanche carry it in small cloth sacks tied to their belts or around their ankles in order to repel snakes. [752] In the case of snake bite, the *itse* is chewed to a pulpy consistency and spread over the fang punctures, or it is retained in the mouth of the one who attempts to suck the poison from the wound. It is also used in this manner for the bites of poisonous spiders and scorpions.

In addition, Sanapia boils it into a thick broth for patients suffering from pneumonia. She notes that one of *itse*'s interesting characteristics is that it causes excessive salivation, and she therefore employs it when she must induce salivation in a patient.

osidobeda

[137] peyote" *Lophophora williamsii* (peyote)

Peyote is Sanapia's most utilized general medicine, and in her opinion its curative properties can aid in healing any type of human physical affliction. She grinds and pounds the dried buttons to a powder which is then boiled or

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
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a wife, the other three having died from overwork. Neither would he tolerate a slave woman to help his wife.

According to Comanche custom, if you buy a wife and if for any reason she is unsatisfactory, if she runs away, or if she dies, you may go to the wife's father and demand the purchase price back, or another wife if there is still an unmarried daughter.

Concerning Mo-cho-rook's cruelty, it was said that he never took a prisoner. He killed all, as he came to them: warriors, women, old men, children, babies; and he took no prisoners. My memory is too faulty to give the number of scalps he was supposed to still have. One thing seemed pretty authentic. He was supposed to have a full-length lariat (approximately thirty-three feet) that he had plaited from women's hair—Mexican, Indian, and white.

I was never able to learn whether plaiting was an American Indian–developed art, or if it was learned from the Spanish. Many of the old fellows plaited excellent round rawhide ropes, and also many of them were quite proud of their horsehair lariats. Mo-cho-rook was the one and only man who was supposed to have one plaited from women's hair.

His death on October 4, 1915, at the age of eighty-nine, was slightly on the prosaic side. At least he died in bed. But he saw fit to lend a dramatic touch. He had sustained a broken hip while working with his horses. They brought a doctor out from Lawton, when he refused to go to the Indian hospital. The doctor put him in a cast, but when the doctor came back in a few days, he found that the old chap had made his wife cut the cast off. She had brought him dogwood switches from the creek, and he had plaited himself a wicker cast to hold his leg and hip. He lived only a short time.

As to his age, here is all we have to go by. The Comanche roll was made up soon after the surrender in 1875. At that time he was arbitrarily given the birth year of 1828. That means that they judged him to be fifty years old. It is extremely unlikely that even then any of the warriors who were on the raid when he was kidnapped from Mexico were alive. A little arithmetic will show that they would have been at least seventy years old. That is just older than Indians became at that time, under the conditions they lived in.

Another bit of arithmetic brings some interesting conclusions. Supposing that Mo-Cho-rook's birth year is approximately correct, that means he would have been an active warrior by the year 1844. That